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Drug trial for town's benefactor

ST. PAUL [UPI]—A man who showered a Minnesota town with gifts, including \$500,000 in airport renovations, used that airport as a cocaine-smuggling base, prosecutors said in his drug trial.

Joseph Diego "Casey" Ramirez, 37, masterminded a two-year, multimillion-dollar Latin American operation, Assistant U.S. Atty. John Lee said Monday. The operation ended in 1983, when Ramirez had to ditch a plane carrying 397 pounds of cocaine to avoid authorities in the Bahamas, Lee said.

Ramirez, whom the prosecution called the "mystery man of Princeton," lavished the town of 3,100 with gifts including new police cars, palm trees for city hall, a \$1 million interest-free loan and airport renovations.

But federal investigators say they have been unable to verify jobs Ramirez said he has held.

Ramirez, who has claimed at various times he was a gynecologist, whiskey salesman, professional tennis player and CIA agent, smiled through much of the pre-trial proceedings, even though he faces a maximum of 50 years in prison and \$90,000 in fines if convicted on cocaine and tax-evasion charges.

DEFENSE LAWYER Ronald Meshbesh recently apologized to U.S. District Judge Edward Devitt for what the judge called Ramirez's "cavalier attitude." The attorney explained that Ramirez is "just a happy-go-lucky guy."

Ramirez was released briefly after his July 26 indictment, but Devitt ordered him jailed again when he failed to turn in his pilot's license as directed. Devitt said he wanted the license surrendered because he feared Ramirez would flee. Ramirez told Devitt he just couldn't find the license.

"I've just lost confidence in him," Devitt told Meshbesh at a bond hearing.